



UPDATE: The Truth about IDOE's 2011 Legislative Agenda
Dr. Tony Bennett, Superintendent of Public Instruction

Hi, I'm Tony Bennett, Indiana's Superintendent of Public Instruction. Thank you for taking time out of your busy day to watch this message.

Last month, the Indiana Department of Education shared a podcast regarding Indiana's 2011 Education Agenda with you. That podcast came in direct response to misconceptions in the field regarding the agenda. At the time, Indiana State Teachers Association President Nate Schnellenberger offered to assist in diffusing some of the concerns we were hearing from teachers, and I remain hopeful he will work with us to share the most accurate and up-to-date information with Indiana's educators. We received an overwhelmingly positive response from last month's podcast, so today I would like to address some of the latest misinformation circulating regarding legislative proposals supported by the IDOE.

Before I get to the myths directly related to our agenda, I would like to address another, more general rumor. Of all the inaccurate information and inflammatory rhetoric out there, nothing bothers me more than when I hear people say IDOE is anti-teacher and is actively trying to destroy public education. I have had the opportunity to personally meet thousands of teachers since taking office in 2009, and I hope those folks know this rumor to be completely false.

I have dedicated my career to serving as a teacher and administrator in Indiana's public schools. All four of my children attended public schools. And today I take very seriously my duty to ensure the approximately one million Indiana school children receive the highest quality education possible.

Indiana is home to many great teachers, and I wholeheartedly appreciate their daily efforts on behalf of our children. While every student is different, and every day isn't easy, I believe most teachers find their profession rewarding. At IDOE, we work hard to get the word out about successes Indiana's educators are achieving in the classroom, and a quick visit to our web site will recap some of our high-profile efforts including ceremonies honoring high-growth educators and classroom visits with top-notch teachers.

At the same time, as State Superintendent, I must think about the parts of our education system that aren't working as well as they should be. While chronically failing schools represent only one percent of Indiana's schools, I have a moral and legal obligation to the children who attend them. These children deserve better, and I invite you to stand with me and call for action on their behalf.

It's also important for you to know IDOE is working hard to identify ways we can do a better job of recognizing and rewarding our best teachers. No matter how much we celebrate the successes and exemplary work we see, I don't think we will reach a point where teachers feel they are being treated professionally until we address the way our state handles personnel decisions and professional development. Great teachers should be rewarded for their efforts and paid more. And those teachers who are working hard to improve every day deserve meaningful feedback and guidance to help them grow.

As I outline some of the misconceptions surrounding our "Putting Students First" agenda, please keep in mind IDOE has been fielding questions from teachers and administrators regarding these statements via email and during recent visits with educators all over Indiana. And we will continue to do so. I want you to know how much we appreciate the truly thoughtful questions we are receiving. Feel free to continue sending your

thoughts and questions to me at superintendent@doe.in.gov, and we will do our very best to respond in a timely manner. Thank you for listening and let's get started.

Myth # 1: Indiana's reforms will allow the State Superintendent to terminate any teacher's contract at any time.

IDOE has not been made aware of such language in any bill, and if it did exist, I would wholeheartedly oppose it. Personnel decisions of this nature should be made at the local level.

Myth # 2: The state will require school corporations to publish summaries of teacher's evaluations in the local media.

IDOE has not advocated for the sharing of personally identifiable information. The Department does support school corporations submitting annual reports to IDOE identifying the number of educators placed in each performance category. IDOE would then publish the results in a manner that protects and respects the privacy of Hoosier educators.

Myth # 3: Indiana's reforms to teacher due process will result in teachers being unfairly dismissed from the classroom.

Our legislative agenda DOES NOT CALL FOR THE ELIMINATION OF DUE PROCESS FOR TEACHERS. Instead, IDOE aims to streamline current due process, align it with the current principal due process, and make it more focused on demonstrated teacher effectiveness based on locally developed, multi-faceted evaluations. Administrators must be able to prove incompetence with documented ineffective evaluation ratings over multiple years. IDOE supports legislation that gives a teacher whose contract is not renewed the right to a conference with the local superintendent and the school board to present his or her story, with representation.

Myth # 4: The state will be able to force a school corporation to modify a collective bargaining agreement that it "does not like" and withhold funds if the corporation does not comply.

This idea is not proposed or supported in our legislative agenda.

Myth # 5: The Superintendent of Public Instruction will determine the state funding formula.

This is completely false. The Superintendent has no such authority. More than 40 members of the legislature assigned to pertinent committees will have a say in developing the formula that dictates how state dollars are spent on education. Before it can be enacted, all 150 members of the state legislature vote on the proposed formula.

Myth # 6: Students leaving public schools for non-government schools will bankrupt Indiana's public schools.

Public dollars spent on education will continue to follow the student, just like they do in the case of public school transfer students. Since school corporations receive a set amount of tuition support for each of their students each year, they will not be harmed by losing funds, as schools should not require funding for students they no longer educate. It is also worth noting Indiana's non-government schools have limited capacity to accept new students.

Myth # 7: Non-government schools that participate in the opportunity scholarship program will not have the same accountability as public schools.

Participating non-government schools will be held to the same high accountability standards as those to which the state holds public schools. Under this proposal, every participating school must administer the ISTEP to all students and will be assigned a letter grade. Furthermore, IDOE proposes removing from the program schools earning D or F grades in consecutive years.

I addressed the remaining myths in the January podcast, but I wanted to reiterate the high points for you here. For additional information, you can view the January podcast at www.doe.in.gov/puttingstudentsfirst.

Myth # 8: Indiana's Education Agenda calls for the repeal of collective bargaining rights.

This statement is completely false. IDOE has not advocated for the repeal of collective bargaining rights, and our legislative agenda will not include language that calls for the elimination of collective bargaining rights. To be clear, our agenda does aim to focus collective bargaining agreements between school corporations and teachers unions on salaries and wage-related benefits – and we believe this will help ensure Indiana's great teachers are getting paid what they deserve to get paid. It will also help schools put students first by eliminating provisions that require administrators to conduct blind draws, roll the dice or consider the sum of the last four digits of a teacher's Social Security Number to break a tie on seniority when making reduction in force decisions.

Myth # 9: Indiana's Education Agenda deducts money from teacher retirement funds to avoid further cuts to Indiana schools.

There is no truth to this statement. No one at IDOE has had a discussion surrounding this topic, and I promise no one will. If this possibility is discussed during this year's legislative session, I will oppose it.

Myth # 10: Indiana's Education Agenda mandates an evaluation system that will evaluate teachers based solely on students' ISTEP+ scores.

IDOE does not support evaluation tools that only take into account student performance on standardized tests. IDOE supports evaluation systems that consider multiple measures, including student growth and student engagement.

Myth # 11: Indiana's Education Agenda mandates equal percentages of teachers be placed into four performance categories during the evaluation process or places them into categories using a bell curve

This is absolutely false. The IDOE advocates creating four evaluation categories for teachers and principals: highly effective, effective, improvement necessary, and ineffective. While teachers will be placed into categories based on several performance indicators, there is no model that mandates 25% of teachers be placed into each category.

Myth # 12: Indiana's Education Agenda forces schools and school corporations to use a one-size-fits-all evaluation tool.

This couldn't be further from the truth. Indiana's Education Agenda aims to increase local control by allowing school corporations to use evaluation tools that work best within their school communities. IDOE will provide guidance, and will even offer models for consideration, but school corporations will decide for themselves what tools to use.

Myth #13: Indiana's Education Agenda reduces teacher salaries.

Again, this is false. IDOE's legislative proposals actually seek to enable local school corporations to set up systems to reward teachers with higher pay.

Myth #14: Indiana's Education Agenda takes tenure away from teachers who already have it.

There is no plan to take away tenure from teachers who have earned it under the current system. IDOE does, though, support a revamped tenure process for new teachers wherein job security and protections are based on performance rather than just seniority.

I hope you have found this video to be helpful and informative as you consider the various legislative proposals aimed at improving our system of education in Indiana. I encourage you to share this information with colleagues who may have questions or concerns. I also hope you will continue to check our website (www.doe.in.gov/puttingstudentsfirst) for the most up-to-date information on our 2011 legislative efforts aimed at rewarding great teachers and principals, ensuring real accountability and flexibility, and offering high quality options for all families.

Once again, thank you for all your hard work on behalf of Indiana's students. I look forward to hearing from you in the weeks ahead.